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World Handbook of Political Indicators IV

Principal Investigators: J. Craig Jenkins; Charles Lewis Taylor, Virginia Polytechnic and State University; Marianne Abbott, independent scholar

The *World Handbook of Political Indicators* has been published by Yale University Press since 1963 to provide statistics and data to help scholars studying political processes and political change. While the handbook has been the dominant source for analyzing conflict and violence internationally, data collection for the last edition stopped in 1982.

In this fourth edition, Jenkins and his team aim to bring the handbook current to 2003 and make the data available over the Internet. In the process, they have made several revolutionary changes that will prepare the handbook for 21st century research.

First, Jenkins has used machine coding rather than human coding to boil down a decade of world events into a series of cross-national statistics. He has done this by working with Virtual Research Associates (VRA), a company formed by Harvard researchers, to develop a system for its automated data coder called Knowledge Management.

Second, Jenkins has expanded upon coding instruments used in previous editions of the *World Handbook* to encompass variables tracked by such widely used datasets as Conflict and Mediation Events Observations (CAMEO), Militarized Disputes (MID), and World Events Interaction Survey (WEIS).

In the case of *WH IV*, more than 1 million events covered by Reuters Business Briefs published from 1990-2003 were fed into the automated coder. The coder then analyzed these stories based on a framework of "who does what to whom when and where."

This framework has allowed *WH IV* to track about 250 "event forms." Examples include optimistic or pessimistic comments; meetings and discussions; praise, apologies or promises; military, economic or humanitarian aid; requests for help, action or protection; proposals, refusals, accusations, complaints, demands, warnings, threats, demonstrations, or sanctions; arrests or abductions; assaults, riots or weapons attacks; human illness and death; currency, prices and payments; beliefs and values; and other events such as natural disasters, accidents, animal attacks, performances and sports contests.

This expansion has led to several improvements to the *World Handbook*.



J. Craig Jenkins
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For example, while *WH III* concentrated on state actors, *WH IV* includes data on non-state actors such as individuals, groups (including concepts like crowds), organizations (including corporations), and even non-human actors (such as diseases). Also, while *WH III* concentrated on political events, *WH IV* includes events in the social, environmental and economic arenas, adding substantially to data about social conflict, particularly protests.

The main disadvantage to automated coding is that a computer does not recognize when multiple news stories are covering the same event over a period of time. Thus, human reviewers must go through the data to make sure significant or ongoing events are only counted once. The Mershon Center grant has supported this process in 2006-07.

Jenkins and his team expect that when the *World Handbook of Political Indicators IV* is published, it will become the international standard for civil conflict event research.

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